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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3223
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3088
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000990

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: EDUCATION NGO "GIVES UP" ON
REGISTRATION EFFORTS

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. After seven attempts to register since 2007, the director of a nongovernmental education association said it is useless to continue re-applying until the Turkmen government changes its NGO policy. Even the presence of many of the organization's alumni in high government posts had not been enough to secure registration. The director suggested that government reluctance is based on a misunderstanding about the role of NGOs, equating the term with "anti-government" organization. Meanwhile, the organization continues to provide training in English and computer skills for graduate students in the basement of the Academy of Sciences, as well as conducting other training throughout the country. In order for the NGO registration situation to improve, there needs to be a fundamental change of perspective within the government that would recognize NGOs as partners, rather than potential rivals. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On August 3, poloff met with the Director of the Turan Mugallym Association, Jamilya Sarjayeva, to discuss the organization's work and the status of its application to register with the government. Turan Mugallym provides a range of training services and is staffed by twelve former university teachers, all of whom are alumni of USG programs. The Director explained that for ten years during former President Niyazov's government, English language instruction was eliminated. Because the length of study was reduced to nine years and English, physical education, and other subjects were eliminated, 10,000 teachers became unemployed "in an instant." At that time, a lot of people began NGOs, not in order to provide some needed social service, but just to earn money. Sarjayeva said it was an unpleasant phenomenon and that it was hard to trust such people. She said it spoiled the attitude of society toward NGOs. She started Turan Mugallym in 2002, calling the group a "training association" rather than an NGO.

13. (C) Poloff's meeting with Sarjayeva took place in Turan Mugallym's classroom and office space in the basement of the Academy of Sciences complex. At this location, Turan Mugallym conducts English and computer training courses for graduate students working on their "aspirantura" (a three-year graduate degree equivalent to a U.S. masters

degree). The English courses improve language skills, but also develop skills in giving presentations and allow students to fully use the Internet as an information resource. Sarjayeva mentioned that Deputy Chairman for Economy and Finance Tuwakmammet Japarov and Deputy Minister of Economy and Development Sadykov were former students in her program. The level of students in the program is high. The teachers say they need to be sharp and continue their own training in order to field students' questions. In addition to the courses it offers at the Academy of Sciences, Turan Mugallym implements the NATO-backed Virtual Silk Highway Internet project; provides training at the State Customs Service, the Ministries of Finance and Economy and Development, and the Supreme Audit Chamber; and operates a school for farmers that provides livestock and basic agronomy training, in addition to English and computer skills.

14. (C) Since 2007, Turan Mugallym applied for registration seven times. Each time, the application was rejected with a list of deficiencies. Sarjayeva said she understood that it was useless to re-apply. She asked to meet with the responsible official at the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), but was refused. Sarjayeva pointed out that there is confusion on the part of the government about NGOs. In the minds of government officials, the term is translated in "anti-government" organization. She also pointed out that, throughout the former Soviet Union, the notion of civil society is not understood. She came to understand that there was something "beneath the surface" that interfered with registration. She was told at the MOJ that, "when we open registration, (Turan Mugallym) will be the first"

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organization to be registered.

15. (C) Meanwhile, Sarjayeva has refused offers of assistance from officials at the Ministry of Economy and Development to register as a "business association," a procedure that they offered to complete in 30 days. She said she does not want to register as a commercial entity, but rather as a social group working in the fields of education and literature. If Turan Mugallym had been able to register, it would be able to receive grants directly and fund its own equipment purchases and overhead expenses, as well as salaries. As it now stands, grants are received by the Academy of Sciences, which pays Turan Mugallym's teachers on an hourly basis for training services. Project equipment is the property of the Academy. Turan Mugallym's teachers contribute 15 percent of their wages to the association to cover overhead expenses. Sarjayeva structures the group this way because she wants to work as part of a collective, not as an individual contract teacher.

16. (C) COMMENT: Sarjayeva has succeeded in finding a niche for Turan Mugallym to flourish, despite the difficulties posed by lack of registration. Still, if Turan Mugallym, which enjoys the government's confidence as it operates in government office space and has trained many of its cadres, cannot register, no other organization seems to have a chance under current policy. For now, it appears that the NGO registration issue is frozen within the government, perhaps because of government concern that NGOs would threaten government control. In order for the situation to improve, there would need to be a fundamental change of perspective within the government that would recognize NGOs as partners, rather than potential rivals. END COMMENT.

MILES